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The
COMMONWEAL

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The Price Struggle

THE NATION'S INDECENT and deplorable haste to free itself of wartime controls now is amply rewarded. Return to the relatively free play of supply and demand has not resulted, as certain business leaders promised, in more goods for all at lower prices. On the contrary many shortages persist (for a variety of reasons) but prices have risen from twenty to fifty percent within the interval. With prices materially higher and huge profits generally accelerating, the national demand for higher wages is inevitable. And so the unhappy Australian pursuit race continues. The prospect is no longer the runaway inflation which once haunted our socially-minded economists, but a severe depression.

There is another kind of spiral set in motion when any large sector of the populace is forced sharply to curtail its normal purchases. That is already happening, as President Truman ably pointed out before the Associated Press, with widows and dependents on fixed incomes, and with teachers and other civil servants whose salaries are not swept along at the industrial high-price-high-wage pace. And of course substantial wage increases for public servants necessarily involve higher taxes—so that real wages and substantial purchases would be pared off all round. Hence the growing talk about buyers' strikes, which reflects the curtailed purchasing power of large groups of the citizenry quite as much as the protest against present prices which certain American financial editors now deplore. In a number of lines of merchandise, at any rate, the importance of the technique of selling has again come to be recognized after many months in which company production experts took all the available sunlight.

It is fortunate, at this juncture, that Mr. Truman and a number of others recognize the worldwide importance of making a go of our new peacetime economy. Not only to spare the American people all the anguish of the early nineteen thirties, but also to demonstrate to the uncertain world that a successful economy can be continuously maintained under the comparative freedom of our current political institutions. In this connection it is important to recall both the Kremlin's insistent contention that the United States is headed for an economic bust-up which will dwarf the last depression and the major rôle which America has the duty to play in the essential rehabilitation of western Europe and other lands. With these high stakes it is appalling that some executives are still of the opinion that a depression would be a good thing in that it would "teach labor a lesson and put unions back in their place."

What steps are possible at this juncture? There is the course of moderation all round, as the President proposes. The relationship of profits to wages varies widely from industry to industry, although it is impossible to deny that in every case there is a very real relationship. The connection between profits and prices is much simpler, and if prices went down universally, that would be tantamount to a raise in wages. That is assuredly one course clearly indicated.

On the other hand it is folly to expect much to result simply from a vague general appeal for such action, from spotty, spasmodic and unorganized price reductions by individual altruistic business men and scattered corporations. *Business Week* currently reports that companies with the largest profit margins can be expected to hang on to these margins as long as possible, anyway. A new price control enactment by Congress at this time is unthinkable. Two good suggestions have been advanced, and they might be undertaken in concert. The first is to approach the situation at the local level, as Newburyport, Mass., did in generous immediate response to the President's message (some 90 percent of the local stores reduced prices on all uncontrolled items 10 percent with a patriotic emblem indicating participation, as of

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NRA). The other is the formation of an over-all national business organization, as suggested by Chester Bowles, with the specific function of reducing prices generally. If the depression which must be avoided at all costs can be stemmed by methods such as these, Americans will be getting off dirt cheap.

The Austrian Treaty

THE AUSTRIAN TREATY, in all its shabbiness or splendor, has not yet been put on display, but there is already enough of it showing to make one suspect that, at the end of this conference (Moscow) or the next, it will be revealed to the world as one more example of 1947 statecraft, with all the celebrating over a thing well done confined to representatives of that country whose territory currently begins, unofficially, east of Danzig and Trieste. Even if the Austrians come away with Carinthia still theirs—and with a reasonable amount of luck and justice, they should—the treaty they are being measured for is, so far, the same kind of well-turned, graceful garment that the judging powers hope to clap on the Italians. The Austrians can be expected to react as the Italians have: by biting the hand that outfitted them. And among those outfitters, the Austrians will probably snap most viciously at the wealthiest and most amiable nation in the group, the nation that wanted to do the very best by the Austrians but failed, somehow, to bring it off—the United States.

In the weeks just before the Moscow Conference American officials were in the habit of speaking most generously about the Austrians. The United States, those officials assured the Austrians, planned to insist on the kind of peace treaty—just and merciful—that would allow for Austria's generally helpless position in relation to Germany after the arrival of Hitler. The treaty for Austria was to be much more gentle than the settlements prepared for such enthusiastic German accomplices as Bulgaria, Rumania, or Hungary. There was to be no mention of responsibility for the second World War.

Others may have forgotten those glittering assurances, or may be trying to forget them, but the Austrians, these days, must be wondering whatever happened to all that high talk. For, as Mr. C. L. Sulzberger of the New York *Times* has pointed out in a recent dispatch from Moscow, the treaty that is now being prepared for the Austrians is beginning to look very much like the formula that was supposed to be reserved for offenders like Bulgaria. The United States has given way to the Russians on the question of Austrian war guilt, and the French, for Gallic reasons of their own, have gained full approval of their request that official versions of the Austrian Treaty be prepared only in English, French, and Russian.

The Austrians should be able, without any great fuss, to get over the difficulty of translating their own treaty into German. But the war guilt clause has a more enduring sting. It is an example of the kind of simplified political fact that the citizens of a slighted nation will remember forever. The Austrians, a few years from now, will not remember that the United States held out for a long time before allowing a war guilt clause to be written into their Treaty; they will also have forgotten that (as the United States delegation at Moscow would probably explain the situation) it was necessary to give way on the question of war guilt in order to retain an Austrian Carinthia. They will, instead, brood over the gap between American views and American conference table achievements. The annoying European tendency to regard the United States as a high-level amateur will be strengthened. And there will have come into being in Europe, ready for anybody's manipulation, one more source of tension, distrust, misunderstanding.

Medical Conclusions

DOCTORS, like all scientists, are riding extremely high these days, ready, at a moment's notice, to release a few ponderous reflections concerning the people and the age. Last week they had their chance. The small-pox threat in New York City had abated; more than 2,000,000 people had submitted to immunization, and it was time to draw conclusions. Two million people rushing for serum, spontaneously and of their own volition, was evidence, the doctors said, of the high state of public confidence in medicine that has been brought about, in recent years, through public education and widespread inoculation during wartime.

In general, the doctors are probably right, although they appear to have exaggerated somewhat the prevailing public affection for their calling. There seem, however, to be other significant factors in this instance of a great city's response to a medical warning. Many of the people who recently left their desks to seek out a doctor with a loaded needle probably had less high-minded medical motives than the doctors appear to realize. For one thing, being stuck in the arm is a great social refresher in a city where most conversational topics have been worn to death through daily use. Also, to be jostled about in a line with one's fellows while approaching an unsheathed needle recaptures, momentarily, that sweet imminence of limited danger that the doctors themselves claim to be so necessary for a healthy glandular life. Another thing: many of the people who applied for free inoculations learned about the process while they were in the service, and everybody knows, doctor, that getting one's inoculations up to date was a lovely way to waste an afternoon.

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Two Quotes

FROM an editorial on Centralia: "Adequate protection of life and limb through adequate laws and adequate means of enforcement is the first essential. Along with that must go the establishment of living conditions consonant with American standards and human dignity. No more hovels, no more bleak and dusty company towns, no more lack of adequate sanitary, social and medical facilities . . ." (THE COMMONWEAL, April 11, 1947).

From a Washington news despatch: "J. A. Krug, Secretary of the Interior, issued a report today condemning a majority of bituminous coal-mining communities controlled by the companies as 'a menace to healthful living. . . . Provisions for health range from excellent, on a par with America's most progressive communities, to very poor, their tolerance a disgrace to a nation to which the world looks for pattern and guidance.' . . . State governments . . . were urged to . . . enforce and carry out existing laws 'providing for the protection of miners and other citizens in matters relating to basic sanitation,' such as water supply, sewage disposal, garbage and refuse disposal and stream pollution. The report found that about 72 percent of the mines surveyed [in 22 states] were not adequately prepared to give emergency medical care to seriously injured persons." (New York *Times*, April 18, 1947.)

The Terrorists

THE MINES, the hand grenades at Tel Aviv are not the muskets at Bunker Hill; the Jewish terrorists in Palestine are not the Russian terrorists in the time of the Tsars; they are not the Polish patriots acting against the oppression of the Tsars; they are not the French or the Italian Resistance acting against the oppressing Germans; the immense disproportion between their murderous action against the British and the problem of Israel is one of the most tragic spectacles of our time.

It is very simple. People of Jewish origin must be free to live anywhere in the world, not because they are Jews, but because the world will never be a free world, or a decent world, until any man, of any color, race, religion, nationality, is able to live wherever he was born, but also wherever he may choose to travel; wherever he is working, but also wherever work is to be found; wherever there is free land to farm, unoccupied land on which to build a house.

It is not a step toward this future, or toward anything save a future of misery, when a certain number of Jewish fanatics forget all the Jews throughout the world and pretend to create, in Palestine, by extreme violence, something that they would call a nation, but which would be nothing but a self-administered ghetto. In Palestine they are not opening a new world to the Jews, they are closing to the Jews the world toward which we are working, toward which humanity is stumbling, toward which humanity must advance unless it perish in civil war. The Jewish extremists are trying to build an armed camp with an army to defend it against the Arab world (which has no sympathy for these people attempting to reverse history); meanwhile, in creating this new and fragile fortress, the Jewish extremists have managed to find themselves murdering the soldiers of a nation which not long ago gave everything it had in desperate warfare against the most deliberate enemies the Jews have known since antiquity.

The Jewish extremists have betrayed everyone and everything: in the first place the Zionist dream of a peaceful rehabilitation of Palestine toward which men of good will have worked for years, and for which poor men all over Europe and America have contributed from their earnings. They have betrayed all serious Jewish leadership in Palestine. They continue to betray homeless Jews in Europe, bringing them from one concentration camp to another, piling them miserably into overcrowded ships—so overcrowded that the British Navy recently had to save the passengers of a ship about to overturn. They have betrayed the revolutionary spirit, the bravery of all desperate men throughout history who fought against oppression, tyranny and cruelty, giving their lives for freedom—by murdering the soldiers of a nation which has no hate for Jews, which, until recently, had never imagined any barrier between English Jews and other Englishmen. They have been murderous against men who had no thought of murder in their hearts. They have attacked men who did not wish to fight. They have called it a war—when they alone sought to kill. They have murdered women and children; they have murdered Jews. That is betrayal.

It is also the most evident political stupidity. The problem of Palestine is not solely a Jewish problem. Palestine is one element in the intricate Near East. In this sense what happens in Palestine is related to what happens in Greece, in Turkey, at Suez, in the oil fields of Iran. The Palestinian situation, politically, is part of the Arab situation, the Mediterranean situation. Do not these Jewish extremists know that the United States is here involved as deeply as Great Britain? As responsible in Palestine as Great Britain? If they did, they could start shooting from ambush at the postman delivering mail in New York; they could throw a bomb here also—with as much reason as they now wreck trains, kidnap and murder in Palestine.

Americans, of all kinds and description, of all origins, the product of early or late immigration,

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must now join together in order to save the Jews of all the world from the consequences inherent in the stupid and treacherous action of the Jewish terrorists of Palestine (and also in that of their incredibly inept supporters in New York). The United States must take its full share of responsibility in the Near East, instead of leaving the British to do what they can, and then playing shameless politics here with whatever they do. The United States must tell the homeless Jews of Europe that those conscienceless men who are recruiting them for the trip to Palestine are betraying them through fanaticism as grievously as if it were for money.

It is not easy, it is not made easier, when you read about the Palestinian crimes, this mockery of rebellion; it is not made easier when Acting Mayor Impellitteri of New York irresponsibly receives at City Hall, as if they were heroes, the irresponsible crew which manned the ship *Ben Hecht* irresponsibly sent out to Palestine by Americans—but it has to be done, we still have to work to make a world in which all men can live in peace. That world is for us, for the Jews, for everyone. From it no man may secede. It is a world in which there can exist no ghettoes. No irritation must divert us from that task.

C. G. PAULDING.

Hope Has Not Left Us

THE CHRISTIAN, if he lives according to his Faith, appears to the adepts of materialism as a man turned in on himself, hypnotized by what takes place within him, suffering the pains which André Gide, I think, called "salvation cramps," and consequently entirely indifferent to all that marxist analysis has revealed to be man's true condition. This refusal to perceive the real problem, which is on the economic plane, this refusal to see that it is in the worker's fate, in the fate of *homo faber,* that man's history is actually written, this escape into the eternal which so evidently serves the interests of the privileged classes—here, broadly speaking, is what a communist finds detestable in a Christian.

For his part, the Christian has a horror of that mutilation which the materialist inflicts on man, who is also *homo sapiens,* capable not only of thinking, but of virtue, and carrying within him the twofold seed of heroism and holiness. In the heavy shadow of that terrifying technocracy which weighs more and more heavily on poor humanity, whether it be of Slavic or Anglo-Saxon origin, the Christian becomes more clearly aware each day that the values of which he is the depository constitute the last chance for humanity, and that when He who incarnates this supreme hope says: "I am the Life . . ." that word is the truth in its most physical sense. The Christian has no doubt whatever that today the convents and all places of prayer in which a small part of humanity struggles toward purity and perfection are working as effectively as those in scientific laboratories—and with less danger to humanity—for the salvation of this planet and of all that lives and suffers on its surface.

Roughly, these are the contradictory positions, and, if the men who hold them and oppose each other are in good faith, it is not possible to believe that they cannot be reconciled. For, in plain fact, even the Carthusian monk most completely isolated from the world lives entirely for his brothers and in closest union with them. Deformations of religious feeling, the use that has been made of religion, more or less unconsciously, throughout history, by the privileged classes, the slow corrosion of man's selfishness (when he cheapens the word charity, which means love, and gives it the restricted and mediocre sense of alms) all this does not alter the Christian's essential vocation: to work to make that love sovereign even on earth, "on earth as in Heaven," as he has been taught to do in the *Pater Noster.* And, far better than many Catholics, the communists know this to be true, for in the factory suburbs where they are the masters, they see what a handful of priests and certain leaders of the Young Christian Workers (J.O.C.) are accomplishing today.

Why, then, may we not hope that the marxists, in their devotion to the concrete fact, may not admit some day that historical materialism remains unthinkable for many minds? And that even in the most materialist of times when all spiritual values are officially despised and denied —when the scientist dogma seems unreservedly accepted by the greater part of the working class —a hunger and a thirst remain in man's heart, a hunger and an unquenchable thirst, a longing which Marx's Kapital fails to answer, but to which another book responds, The Gospel, "the document that breathes," as Claudel calls it.

Beneath the age-encrusted structures of the Church, so ill-adapted to the modern world, a basic labor is being carried out by a small number of priests, a few religious, certain laymen. Doubtless it is best not to speak of this work, for it must be carried out with humility. All seeds need shade and silence, and the men and women who are devoting their lives to this particular work would not like to have people make fine phrases about it or about them. Yet it is because they exist that hope has not left us, in spite of all that we are compelled to see and hear day after day. It is because of them that we still refuse to accept what might seem to be the evidence, and do not believe that we live in a world which stands condemned.

FRANÇOIS MAURIAC.

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North African Letters

From Augustine to Albert Camus

Anne Fremantle

THE ALLIED LANDINGS in North Africa, of November 8th, 1942, served both to separate that continent from Europe economically (and so brought famine and ruin to thousands) and to re-integrate it intellectually and spiritually.

North Africa historically has always belonged within the sphere of Mediterranean culture, whether Egypt, Greece, Rome, Arabia, or France was the dominant power. And North Africa has always produced exciting, gifted writers, violent, impetuous, *fougueux*, to use an adjective always linked to North Africa by the French, from the days of Saint Augustine and Origen, and the later times of the greatest of Arab historians, Ibn Khaldun, to lightweights of the nineteenth century such as Fromentin, Isabella Eberhardt and Louis Bertrand.

M. Albert Camus, the brilliant young Algerian novelist, who is probably today the most distinguished African author alive, insists that Algeria is very like America. There has been, he declares, in North Africa, as on the eastern seaboard of America, the same constant succession of invasions and assimilations, the same continual arrival of people who came to conquer or loot and stayed and settled. There is, too, the same violence of climate, of landscape and of incident: an American river must always be the longest or the fastest, an American snowstorm is inevitably the worst in umpteen years; if there is a train-smash, in any other country you have two injured and one dead, in America there are always seventeen dead and twenty on the danger list. In North Africa buses roll off cliffs, planes crash into torrents, hundreds are homeless from freak natural acts, as here: a landslide obliterates not one village, but three; the locusts destroy the food not of a hundred, but of several thousand people. When M. Camus first landed here, and eager reporters asked him what he thought of New York, the slim boyish-looking French author said, sadly, "It's just like Oran." And Oran he has described as the Minotaur, as a monstrous snail, turning its back to the sea, and contemplating its own anonymous ugliness: a city where a hard sky broods over dust-laid blocks of indifferent concrete.

But there is an immense distinction which must be made between the two seaboards. Those who came to the American littoral all brought luggage, whether they came in that heavily overloaded boat, the Mayflower, or in later and larger ships. Those who came to Africa were either shipwrecked on that singularly inhospitable coast, or were pirates, or mercenaries: what they had could be carried in a red spotted cotton handkerchief. And the most important thing the first settlers brought to America was, of course, their ideas. Whereas no one brought ideas to Africa—they rather found them there. From the Pilgrim Fathers to the German Intellectuals of '48, and from the White Russians of yesteryear to the refugees of today, all men coming to America have brought intellectual gifts: to Africa the riff-raff of the Mediterranean having come seeking them.

Richness of culture is almost always the result of miscegenation on a large scale. And this miscegenation must take place within a society whose institutions are, either for democratic or other reasons, fairly liberal and flexible. The other reasons may well be remoteness, as that of Africa from Rome, or from Baghdad, or the boredom of the French with their colonies—for their attitude is only a little less characterized by an almighty yawn than is that of the British. The shores of the Mediterranean have been historically the world's cultural nexus, the meeting-place of all peoples. And the two greatest cultural forces in the world today, France and America, are so because they have been overrun by so many kinds of little pattering feet, of so many different colors, that they have been trampled into being the fertilizers of genius.

★

The greatest handicap North Africa has to contend with, from the intellectual point of view, is that there are, actually, two languages, but that only one is recognized. This creates an Isaac-Ishmael ambivalence. French is the only official language, though there are, in Algiers, only one million Europeans (including Jews) to nine million Arabs, and in Morocco, there are eight million Moroccans compared with considerably less than a million French. But at the Brazzaville Conference, held in the darkest

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days of the last war, when, if ever, it might have been expected that the mother-country might make some concessions, France firmly declared that French must be, as before, the language of all instruction, and absolutely forbade the "pedagogical use of local dialects, not only in public but also in private schools."

This would seem to take care of the future. For the present, over one million Arab children are condemned to "analphabetism" because there are neither buildings nor teachers enough. In all Algeria there are only 41 Arab doctors (one only is a woman), 22 chemists, 9 dentists, 70 lawyers and 500 school-teachers. There is no Arab university except in Tunis, though there is a Medersa, or High school, in Algiers. But in Algiers University there are, currently, only 500 Arab students, compared with several thousand French. So, within two hostile frameworks, as though stretched sleepless in twin beds, the French and Arab cultures of Northern Africa quite unsuccessfully pretend to ignore each the other's existence, whilst holding their breath to listen to the other's breathing, and to determine whether they are awake or snoring.

★

North African Arab culture is centered chiefly in Tunis, with outcroppings in Tlemcen (Algeria) and in Fez (Morocco). In Tunis, before the war, there was brisk intellectual exchange with Egypt and the Near East—above all with Syria. The Arab libraries and the newspaper kiosks carried the current magazines and monthlies from Cairo, Beyrouth and Damascus, and touring companies brought the latest Arab theater to Tunis. The evil effect of the war, which ended this *veneranda commercia,* was counterbalanced by the national effort required from the Tunisian intellectuals, and very adequately rendered by them. Perhaps the most important of the local Tunisian writers is Sheikh Fadel el Achour, the historian, professor at the University of Ezzitouna. Another historian of note is Sheikh Mohammed Chadly Niafar, whose recent history of the Islamic navy has been very well considered. There has as yet arisen no poet to take the place of Kacem Echabb, who died a few years ago, still young, but there is a flurry of young Arab poets in Tunis, some of whom are writing in the Tunisian dialect (the best known is Mahmoud Bourhiba) and many of these show promise. Meanwhile, French classics continue to be translated into Arabic and most eagerly read: Kamal Youcef has just translated Bergson's "Essai sur les données immediates de la conscience" and Ricahi has rendered Flaubert's "Salambo," and B. Abouchahak, Voltaire's short stories.

It is perhaps quite a good thing that North African Arab cultural life was detached from too great dependence on the wider Arab world, for Syria threatens to flood almost all the Arab countries with European-trained ex-exiles. "We have provided Egypt with a complete set of experts," one young Syrian told me proudly, "and, when North Africa gets its independence, we are ready to supply them with all the intellectual personnel they need."

Two years ago, a special congress was convened in Cairo, to discuss the problem of Arab calligraphy: should not Arabic, like Turkish, go over to the Roman script? Tremendous passion was aroused throughout the Arab world, and press campaigns prevented the congress from completing its deliberations. Nor was the successful example of Turkey entirely approved by the Arabs, with many of whom Turkey is in the dog-house, owing to her cession of the Sanjaks of Alexandretta and of Antioch to the French—considered a treacherous pandering to the West by many Muslims.

In Algeria, all the Arab journals are in French —even the banned *Parti du Peuple,* Algeria's clandestine leaflet, and even the recently founded, non-political *As-Salam,* a highbrow bi-monthly edited by M. Hamza Boubakeur. The intellectual center of the country is Tlemcen, which is literally bursting with young Arab poets and intellectuals most of whom are writing in French, and many of whom are being published in Paris. Many Algerian Arabs go to Montpellier and many to Paris for their university studies, and some young Arab intellectuals cannot even write Arabic: one ultra-nationalist young schoolmaster, who had a book coming out this spring in Paris about the historical background of Algerian nationalism, told me it took him two whole years after he finished high-school to learn to write Arabic.

★

Arabic itself is becoming gallicized: many words in common use have now two plurals, one used by the old-fashioned and by the purists, the other colloquially. Thus telephones can be *telephonat* generally, though it is more correct to say *"teleafon."*

And how the young Arabs read—they really would rather read than eat! Newspapers cost at the very least 4 francs; the average daily wage of an Arab laborer is 60 francs (about 50 cents) and yet almost everyone reads at least one paper a day. The keeper of the general store at Laghouat told me he had 2,000 subscribers, all of whom had paid in advance, for the BBC's Arab-language journal, and I was with him when the mail came in, and it was 9/10ths newspapers—for an oasis where there is nothing like enough to eat! In Fez, the holy city of Morocco, almost all the merchants, in their 6 ft. x 6 ft. stores, sat

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reading, and only put down their books when shouted at by a prospective customer. In Ghardaia, the newspaper vendor told me they had literary evenings once a week, as well as political ones. In almost every village the children go to Koranic school from 6 to 8 a.m.—even those who go to regular school from 8 to 4.

For the French intellectuals of Northern Africa, the Allied landings were an unmitigated blessing. Then suddenly, during a brief flowering, Algiers became the literary and artistic capital of France, and reviews such as *Fontaine* were started, and were edited in Algiers. M. Albert Camus, with M. Jean Amrouche, a Kabyle of Berber ancestry (who is one of the most interesting young writers now working in Paris), founded *L'Arche,* a review almost entirely North African in conception and personnel, of uniformly high standard, and one of the most exciting and stimulating vehicles of current life and letters.

When the French moved back to Paris, the intellectual élite of Algiers moved with them. MM. Camus and Amrouche founded the publishing house of Charlot, which has done and is doing extraordinarily well. They have just picked a winner in M. Jules Roy's "La vallee Heureuse," a novel about the Saar (which has won the Prix Renaudet), and they have also published distinguished novels by other young Algerians, of which Jeanne Terracini and de Freminville are two of the most worth watching.

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I asked M. Amrouche why the young hope of Algeria had all come to Paris, instead of maintaining Algiers as the literary center it had been during the Allied occupation. But he said no one could make a city what it was not. There where the living body lieth, the eagles will be gathered together, and all the life of France, and of anything written in French, is Paris. Algiers, he insisted, indeed all Algeria, is not capable of sustaining life. North Africa can produce sparks aplenty, and can serve as flint to light a fire. But Africa cannot nourish a genius, even when she has produced one—France must act as wet-nurse.

In a recently published and quite unusually provocative article called "The Eternal Jugurtha," M. Amrouche has analyzed the impetuous, *irréel,* burning African temperament. Incapable of gestation, if Minerva does not spring instantly from his first Jovian headache, Jugurtha flops. It is not just that he has a bad case of sulks, but more basically that he lacks constancy, lacks the grace to persevere. Like her almost useless rivers, always or in tempestuous spate or lost in the sand, the North-African literary talent can mature only through the gray discipline of hard work, cut-throat competition, and the day-long, century-long traditions of French authorship.

The Lehmann Story

VINCENT SHEEAN

THERE IS NO ARTIST in the world today with a more devoted public than Lotte Lehmann has. It is also a large public: it fills such spacious theaters as the Orchestra Hall in Chicago to overflowing, and it buys out five or six recitals a winter in the Town Hall in New York nearly a full year in advance. This public is made up of a variety of elements, amongst which singers, conductors, pianists and other professional practitioners are always noticeable. Mme. Lehman is a "musician's singer" in some respects; Bruno Walter recently remarked that to attend one of her recitals was a music lesson to anybody who had ever practiced the art. But she is also, and even more, a poet's singer, for nowhere else in the experience of the past twenty-five years has it been possible to find such lyrical expression. For this reason the German or German-speaking element in a Lehmann audience is also very noticeable: these are the people who really know the meaning of each word, and receive the content of the most affecting songs in silence and tears. And, finally, there is a public of students not always fully aware of what the singer is doing, but keyed up to a pitch of great excitement by the realization that whatever it is, it is magic.

To these people, the Lehmann audience, what the routine music critics have to say of her performances matters nothing at all. In fact, the newspaper critics might as well not mention her; to a Lehmann devotee nothing they could say would be adequate, and most of their comment becomes mere annoyance. This is particularly true in New York, where apprentice critics of twenty-three and twenty-four write about this superb artist in patronizing tones as if she were a part of the daily fare of the workaday world. Music criticism is a wretched trade at best, and when it sinks, as in New York, into a blather of prejudice, venality and *arrivisme,* in which really horrifying practices are accepted by the whole musical world as being necessities of the career, then those who love music will be well advised to ignore it. Aside from its more scandalous aspects, New York music criticism is also afflicted by various fashionable cults of the moment: one of the leading critics—the one who writes the best English—has a mania for French music and has until recent years been unable to accept the German nineteenth century without nausea; another is afflicted by the cult of "bigness" and has never been known to write about anything so simple as a song. These peculiarities taken together, and seasoned with such good old-fashioned rackets as blackmail and extortion, make all the printed musical judgments in New

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York subject to the suspicion which some among them justify.

This has been particularly the case with Lehmann. If you took the Lehmann reviews from the daily newspapers for the past few years and looked them over in sequence, you would derive the impression that a very, very old lady was doing something very, very remarkable, but you would never be able to guess what it was. The insistence upon the singer's age is childishly stupid of course, particularly since she is no older than a good many other artists now at the height of their powers; the fresh, glowing vitality of her presence on the stage cannot be suggested by such words. To show their knowledge of vocal techniques the critics often talk about high and low notes (as if they were reviewing Lily Pons) and when they have a favorable remark to make they are likely to throw in the words "still' or "even now," in polite surprise. The truth of the matter is that few among them know the great song literature well enough to review it; many among them are unfit to judge any artist above the student rank; and Lehmann has been a famous singer for so long that most of the musical journalists assume everything about her to be an old story. They do not seem to be aware that a miraculous transformation has taken place before their very eyes and in their hearing, and that a new Lehmann has been created, an artist at this point, 1947, just coming to the pinnacle of her achievement. So far from being an old story, Lehmann is at the present moment the newest story in concert music.

What is more, it is an American story. Europe has never really known Lehmann the lieder-singer, the greatest lieder-singer of the age. She is now about to take to Europe, to London, Edinburgh, Paris, Vienna and other places, the art that developed in this country in the long years of exile. Lehmann is an American now in spirit as well as by citizenship; her command of our language (including unexpected bits of slang) is astonishing; and yet I remember that when I first met her about twelve years ago she spoke no English at all. Turning back in mind and spirit from this new environment to the poetry of the country which is hers no more, she has worked out during the past seven or eight years an art so new that very experienced musicians say they have never known anything like it. She is now taking back to Europe an ultimate flower of European culture, matured not only in the new world, but actually at Santa Barbara on the shores of the Pacific. It is there that she has been working for the greater part of every year since the war began, deepening and broadening the esthetic discovery which is peculiarly hers. I shall attempt—without great hope—to define it.

What she tries to do, and succeeds in doing more than any other singer of the age, is to absorb great songs and give them forth again. She does not try to "sing" in the sense that Lily Pons does. She does not try to "perform" in the sense that Maggie Teyte does. There is hardly anything external about her best work, aside from the physical vibrancy of her own stage presence. She makes no attempt at novelties or vulgar curiosities of repertoire: the works of Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Wolf and Strauss are so voluminous that they constitute a whole world in themselves, of which a great part is still unknown to both public and critics. She is constantly enlarging her repertoire (as the critics in New York have not noticed at all), and musicians find in every Lehmann recital some songs they never knew before. During this past season she sang for the first time a considerable number of songs by Beethoven, Brahms and Wolf which had not been performed in New York for many years, if ever. No critic knows the literature well enough to notice when a new song by a master appears. It is only a "novelty" if it is by a fashionable contemporary. Consequently much of what Lehmann has been doing—the new, creative part of it, the most remarkable part—has not been mentioned in print at all. Restricting herself to masterpieces by the greatest composers in the form, she is taken by the musical journalists to be a known, set and unchanging phenomenon: even when they acknowledge the virtue of this art they pay tribute to it as to a static achievement. "Fine performances of familiar songs," one read with astonishment this year after recitals in which very extraordinary things had taken place and completely unfamiliar masterpieces had been revealed.

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To absorb and to give forth is a continuous and living process. The song literature is so vast that if each single song is to be a true creation the prospect before a singer of *Lieder* is endless. If Mme. Lehmann lives to be five hundred years old she will never reach the limits of her art, on which she is already far ahead of any other artist known to experience. The difference between her and other singers is so great in degree that it actually becomes a difference in *kind* and one is able to feel and to say with conviction that what she does is a new art not known before except in rudimentary forms. My own acquaintance with *Lieder* goes back many years, and in fact I have squawked my way through a great many of them myself during the past quarter of a century; I heard Julia Culp when I was very young; in the 1920's I was an admirer of Elena Gerhardt; I have often heard Elisabeth Schumann and other exceptionally gifted singers of songs. They were all different and each had an excellence, but none was more than an adumbration of what Mme.

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Lehmann is today and is becoming more vividly each year, which is to say, a living expression of the poetry and music set down so long ago.

Of the two parts of the process, perhaps that which I have called absorbing the songs is more important, and constitutes the kernel of the secret. It is a very long and intimate communion that goes on before any one of these songs is given out again. Of certain singers it can be said that they learn their words and music easily and give them forth easily; Mme. Flagstad is of this order, a gorgeous voice dealing in superficial musical pleasures. Schumann—a much more delicate instrument—had a similar ease in the essential transaction. Nothing very crucial disturbed her. But Lehmann is satisfied with no less than a total comprehension of the purposes of the poet and composer, reconciling them sometimes in a synthesis of her own, but repairing for the purpose quite obviously to a realm distinct for each song: you can see, hear and feel the moment when she departs into it and the moment when she returns. That realm, different for each of some hundreds of songs, was called into being during these years of solitary work just now culminating.

Lehmann is a newcomer to *Lieder*. It is only within the last three or four years that she has really risen above the preliminary stages in which most singers remain throughout their lives. As a serious and creative *Lieder* singer she is about ten years old now, and very great changes have taken place while we watched and listened. She came into this field with the style of opera and the renown of a great career in all the leading opera houses of the world. In her earlier seasons of *Lieder* she depended upon the little book of words, the fancy handkerchief, the train and all the other accoutrements of the diva giving a concert. Rapidly they vanished; within five years she had acquired an impeccable recital style and a considerable repertoire. It is from then on that the astonishing development has taken place, the discovery of depth upon depth and world upon world within a single song. This she did not even know herself, ten years ago; she has found it out by living through the songs, each as an experience, an *Erlebnis*. It is because the experience is communicated to us, finally, with the effect of revelation, that Mme. Lehmann's recitals this year were without equal in the musical life of anybody who heard them.

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There are some hard facts in this story which need to be known. First of all is the autochthonous nature of the phenomenon. Lehmann became what she is in the absence of all influences, tutelage or assistance. She did not listen to *Lieder* much in the old days in Europe, and although the most familiar songs were familiar to her, as they are to everybody on that continent, she had a great personal exploration to make when she set out for herself. There was nobody in America who could do anything for her once she had passed beyond the original guidance of Bruno Walter. There is nobody in America who even sings the songs, aside from a familiar handful, and much of Lehmann's repertoire she has never heard from anybody but herself.

She was a mature artist of great powers when she began, and thus was able to do a rare thing: to make a sort of medium of herself, a tempered and exquisite medium, for the transmission of the voices she could hear. These are the voices of Goethe, Heine, Beethoven and Schubert, with their immediate successors. Such direct, private and personal communication with the beyond, although it is the prerogative of anybody who can read a book, hardly ever occurs with professional singers; by and large they require an intermediary, a "coach" or other authority to pass on to them what the traditions are on this page or that.

A second fact is that Lehmann's vocal resources are so ample that nothing in the great song literature subjects her to strain or fatigue. Thus she is able to produce tones of great loveliness (especially in the pianissimi) which would have been beyond her twenty years ago, simply because the new art is physically smaller and exacts less of the voice. When she wishes to pour forth vocal splendor—as in Strauss's *Befreit* on February 10 of this year—she can do it with thrilling intensity because it is not often demanded. There is nothing at all easy in the singing of *Lieder;* it is among the most difficult of the arts; but it does not demand the animal strength that goes into opera. Consequently Lehmann's vocal apparatus has been more than enough for the new art and has had, actually, to be brought down to scale. She never experiences those discomfitures with specific notes and phrases which some celebrated singers (Teyte, Hempel, Frijsch) have had lately. The difference is that she is a great singer who has grown naturally into a second, a new, career, who does not attempt what she cannot do and knows exactly what it is that she can do; the others are aging notables trying to extend by the use of the intelligence that musical life which physical nature has already ended.

The Lehmann story, unperceived by the professional journalists of music, has been understood with wonder by musicians and public alike. When has its like been seen before? An expressive talent which made her unique in opera should, perhaps, have given a forewarning of this later and, I think, greater achievement. The second career crowns the first in a way for which no

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parallel comes to mind. Surely the artist's instinct, intelligence and temperament have never so interacted with the resources of the body to produce those supreme statements by which music lives on from age to age and the human spirit survives.

Cultural Drift

JOHN BRODERICK

WHEN, about a year ago this month, I returned home from the US Army Separation Center at Indiantown Gap, Pa., I immediately began a study of native periodicals and the daily press in a search for evidence of fresh American cultural directions that might not have been apparent in barracks mores and conversations. The urgencies of occidental living have frequently drawn me away from my project and I have been unable, so far, to assemble my findings in conclusive academic form. It seems to me sensible, however, to take advantage of this moment of international pause between the beginning of the baseball season and the enactment of the Truman Doctrine, while awaiting the return of Henry Wallace to the United States under police escort, and with summer yet several weeks away, to publish, in outline only, my observations on what have been, for the past twelve months, some of the more interesting, recurrent indications of American cultural stirring.

It has never been an easy matter to catch the authentic threads from off the American social bobbin, and in the early stages of my inquiry I found myself distracted by the pointless hum of American life that constantly beguiles foreign journalists, writers of meaningful fiction, and other sociologists. At about this time last year, as near as I can remember, there was a noisy editorial welter going on about the absence of white shirts. For a week or two I was caught up in this turmoil, but by the middle of my first month at home my ear had again become attuned to the sounds of my homeland. I gave up reading editorials altogether and began to look elsewhere—mainly in other sections of the press—for genuine cultural murmurs.

Shortly after this changeover, while reading a news syndicate account of a warehouse fire somewhere in the eastern part of the country, I came upon the first low whistle of something new struggling for articulation in the dream part of the American consciousness. Apparently the warehouse fire had been intense but brief, and the author of the dispatch—who, in keeping with the general policy of austerity practised by news syndicates, remained anonymous—described the blaze as a "flash" fire. At the time, I merely noted the word combination and passed on to phases of contemporary history discussed in adjoining columns. Within the next few days, however, there were other fires in the east, all of them, according to news syndicate employees at the scene, flash fires. While property owners along the eastern seaboard struggled against this outbreak of strange fires, industrialists in the same area suddenly found themselves plagued by a series of short, acrimonious strikes. These strikes, in contrast to the larger, or historical-wave strikes that were undulating across the body of the nation at the time, were delimited—also by employees of the great news-gathering agencies—as flash strikes. I realized, finally, that here was evidence of an incipient dynamic, rolling around loose in the American section of the world mind.

The symptoms seemed entirely genuine; repeated use of the word "flash" by an editorial writer might have indicated almost any long-range bogus object, but a mass fancy for the term among the company grade officers of a news syndicate could only point to some undeveloped racial yearning. Economic sophistication is most uncommon in the life of the ordinary news syndicate employee; in fact, compared with an editorial writer he might almost be said to be working for nothing. This innocence, plus generally sound health and a prevailing absence of spiritual and intellectual complications, make of him the most credible modern example of the folk writer—a notorious cultural bellwether. Convinced of the importance and soundness of the trend, I settled back, with great expectations, to take notes.

For the next two weeks the east continued to be raked by strikes and fires and the newspapers reported them to be, with few exceptions, flash affairs. I was pleased to see the usage holding up and waited anxiously for some raw employment of the word that would tell more about the gorgeous or outrageous mental subsoil from which it sprang. But instead of new departures, the concept guttered suddenly and went out. Strikes and fires that had flashed all through April were suddenly referred to, in the newspaper stories of late May, as events of brief duration. I decided that I had been following a phenomenon which, in spite of sound appearances, was essentially a cultural vapor trail.

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As a complement to my interest in the daily press I had been reading widely, among the periodicals, in the field of post-war literary criticism, and when my first investigation foundered I was quickly attracted to another quarter, led on by a phrase cast into the public air by Mr. Edmund Wilson, literary critic for one of the low-priced weeklies. "People of taste," Mr. Wilson had written, his attention settling for a moment on the unrepentant commercial figure of Mr. Somerset Maugham, "frequently tell me that I should take Mr. Maugham more seriously." Mr. Wilson then went on to confess that, despite this advice from people of taste, he could not bring himself to believe that Mr. Maugham's artistic mission differed very much from the editorial policy of the *Cosmopolitan* magazine, an admission which he disclosed with a thoroughness that left Mr. Maugham scarcely a literary virtue to bless himself with. For the next couple of weeks Mr. Wilson scuffled with Mr. S. N. Behrman who, in defense of Mr. Maugham, had written a letter of complaint to Mr. Wilson's employers. Mr. Maugham, on the other hand, slipped quietly out of the Fifty-ninth Street entrance of the Plaza Hotel one morning, accompanied by a butler,

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a houseman and a cook, and set off for his duplex near Cap d'Antibes, without even waiting to find out what Mr. Wilson and Mr. Behrman had decided about him.

Although I was mildly interested in the street fight that developed over the amount of delight one might decently experience while reading Mr. Maugham's stories, I was more permanently taken up with the side issue of the problem—ignored in the main discussion—that was suggested by Mr. Wilson's reference to a citizen group with which he had apparently been conferring: people of taste. Was this designation, I wondered, Mr. Wilson's code name for a number of close friends? Or did it, on the other hand, indicate nothing more important than Mr. Wilson's approval of Henry James, whose prose tones were up for reexamination at that moment?

While waiting for further word from Mr. Wilson I noticed that critics on several magazines had apparently already made up their minds about his phrase. The discredited Maugham was scarcely out of the country when Mr. Wilson's fellow critics, extending his standard to general field use, began to complain that most literature of the day was not only unreadable (an imperfection that had been widely noted already) but, even worse, showed almost no signs of taste—an artistic vitamin deficiency which frequently went unnoticed (as in the case of Mr. Maugham) for years. In the interest of tightened literary standards, the most recent work by writers who had managed, in the past, to slip through on vulgar talent was carefully examined for indications of taste. This new awareness passed quickly into professional discussions of the American theater, and some two months after Mr. Wilson had raised the question I noticed that theater critics frequently included, in their genial list of reasons for recommending that a show be closed, some reference to taste.

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As a result of my disappointing experience with flash strikes and fires, I followed more cautiously this growing concern over the absence of national taste; inclined, at first, to view recurrent use of the word as a minor technical addition to the vocabulary of literary judgment, valuable perhaps as a means of impetus for anyone who found himself stalled, momentarily, on the lonely critical wastes part way through a book review, but hardly a matter of collective interest. Persistence of the trend has compelled me, however, to regard it as the herald of important cultural restiveness—a condition which can be traced, I believe, to Mr. Wilson's neglect during the early stages of the Maugham incident. This looseness on Mr. Wilson's part (failure to make clear just who he had in mind when he referred to "people of taste") has brought about a social grouping which, massed behind his novel phrase, must be regarded as a source of potential class disturbance.

Actually, Mr. Wilson may not realize that he has made it possible for the nation's scattered literary elements to reassemble for a spell of group living under a quality banner. Or, if he has noticed the development, he may be pleased with the notion of providing at least temporary refuge for those who often find themselves psychologically displaced in the midst of the coarse democratic surge. There is no reason, obviously, to discount this or any other charitable outgrowth of Mr. Wilson's influence, but these ancillary benefits, though admirable, must be considered secondary features of the problem. Mr. Wilson must be held accountable for the future political behavior of the force he has created.

There is always the chance, of course—and Mr. Wilson may be banking on it—that, before he gets round to disowning them, the people who have assembled in the shadow of his phrase will have wandered off across the social tundra in search of other group shelters. (They are drawn together in this instance, after all, only by the feeble bond of common esthetic agreement, a tie which has never been known to hold an assembly together for very long.) Or maybe Mr. Wilson's phrase itself will detach, sink briefly into the democratic mainstream, and then turn up sometime later on—gross, dripping with popular associations, entirely undesirable. In fact, that may be happening, to some extent, right now. Already somebody has referred to a well-meant art work as a "tasteless ear of corn." Mr. Wilson might keep an eye on that; it would be a way out. Luck, Wilson!

Fish for Breakfast

ALBERT EISELE

A FREIGHT TRAIN drew into the town, stopped, and from an empty box car a tramp climbed down. The day was just breaking. The tramp saw several figures down near the stockyards and he recognized the headquarters for such tourists as himself, but he deliberately turned his steps the other way. This morning he wished to be by himself. It was too early to go uptown, because with few persons on the street he would have been conspicuous. He disliked being conspicuous.

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The sound of gunfire was in the air. The tramp guessed that pheasants were being hunted, because it was now late October, when the pheasant season usually opened. The shooting could be heard in all directions; some reports were near and distinct, others muffled by distance.

The tramp had no gun, but there was a lake near the town—he could see, through the thinning trees, the gleam of the water—and he might be able in some way to get hold of a fish. He had no tackle, but more than once he had picked up a fish that had been stranded in shallows or found a lone fish on a stringer, either forgotten by the angler or deliberately left behind. It was easier to get a fish without tackle than it was to get a bird without a gun.

A dam was not far away, and in the shallows beneath the fall two men in hip boots were seining. The tramp went over. The men were seining for minnows; the tramp said, "Do you ever give any away?"

"You can have carp," said one of the men, "the game fish we have to throw back."

On the next haul there was a fine carp in the net, and one of the men tossed it to him on the grass.

"I am much obliged to you," the tramp said.

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He went up along the railroad tracks until he came to a huge pile of scrap iron; he began to rummage about. One could find almost anything in a heap of scrap iron—occasionally even a frying pan or pancake griddle. Sometimes the pan or griddle had only a faint crack in it, or a small piece chipped out, and it served as well as a new one. Often there was not only a cooking utensil but also an old kitchen range which, after being fitted with a piece of pipe, would cook a meal in superb fashion.

But this time the tramp found no frying pan, no pancake griddle, no old kitchen range. He did, however, find a lid off a corn planter box; it was of iron, heavy and pan-shaped, and was just the thing. There was also plenty of wood, bits of hard wood that adhered to the ironwork and which the tramp knocked off. He soon had a cooking place set up and a fire started. He dressed the carp. From his bundle he took a piece of blackened bacon rind and greased his pan. Then he put the carp on the fire, and it soon began to sizzle and to smell pleasingly.

This was going to be a delightful breakfast. The sun had climbed high enough to neutralize the seasonal October chill and make the air crisp but comfortable. The booming of the pheasant hunters' guns continued unabated, and the tramp's appetite sharpened. Let them eat pheasant fresh from the field; he would eat carp fresh from the water.

Of course a lot of people turn up their noses at carp. Well, such people deserve to starve. Not long ago the tramp had sat in a box car, during a rain, and the talk had turned to fish; a young German, who was following the harvest, said that in Germany carp was considered the best kind of eating. And that's what the tramp had always thought. The first fish that he had ever caught was a carp: he had used sweet corn for bait; his mother had fried the carp for him, and it had tasted as only a first fish could taste. To the tramp carp had tasted good ever since.

A car came dashing up the trail that led to the iron heap. It was a police car; it came to a halt opposite the tramp's fire, a policeman jumped out and barked, "Get out of here! No tramps allowed in this town—the mayor won't have them!" The policeman kicked the tramp's makeshift stove, the structure collapsed, the iron lid that served as a frying pan fell down and threw the half-fried carp to the ground.

"That's my breakfast!" protested the tramp.

"Get out of town!" the policeman said. "See that railroad track behind you. Get going on it and count a whole lot of those ties!"

★

The tramp reached down and caught up the half-fried carp and then headed for the railroad tracks. Along the track he found a paper bag for his half-fried carp and walked on.

About a half-mile away from the town the tramp came to a whistling-post, of cedar, painted red, with the top rounded and painted white, and with one side flattened to receive the letter W, in black. The post was set on a mound which jutted out from the embankment several feet, and the tramp could never see a whistling-post without being reminded what he once thought a whistling-post stood for. He was a small boy at the time walking along the tracks, and when he came to a whistling-post an older boy who was with him said, "Here is George Washington's grave!" And he had believed this until almost a year later when, walking along the tracks on the opposite side of the town, he had found another post with a W on it.

The sound of the pheasant hunting continued, and the tramp could see hunters' cars parked along the country roads, the cars deserted, with the hunters combing the adjoining cornfields. The tramp was very hungry, but the carp in his paper bag was only half-done, and he simply couldn't eat things that were only half-done.

He came upon some old railroad ties that were piled at the trackside, and paused. Embedded in one tie was a rail plate; this he knocked loose with a spike and cleaned of its sand and loose rust. Then he piled ties in two parallel rows, four ties in each row, and between these two rows he suspended the rail plate, by means of old wire from off the fences. Some of the ties were splintered, from having been removed from under the rails with pick-axes, and the tramp soon had a brisk fire going under the rail plate. The plate he greased with his bacon rind, then took the carp from the paper bag and put it, raw side down, on the heated iron.

The weather promised to be a continuation of the Indian summer that had begun just a day or so ago, and the tramp, already warm from his brisk walk of several miles, took off his coat. Directly behind him was a field of ripe, tall corn, which held off whatever faint breezes might otherwise have reached him. From the tassels of some of the stalks gossamers were streaming, and here and there a milkweed seed floated lazily. Off in the distance, along the horizon, the tramp could see a field of corn shocks bobbing about in the heat waves.

Once again the carp began to sizzle and to give out a pleasing smell. Pretty soon it would be browned on both sides, and the tramp could eat. He was famished by now, and felt that he could eat a horse.

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The rattling of cornstalks caught the tramp's ear, and a little later the sudden thunder of hunters' guns from the cornfield behind him. In the next instant four or five pheasants whirred over the tramp's head, with the hunters still banging away at the flushed game. The tramp ducked behind a pile of railroad ties, for he knew that a skirmishing line of hunters would soon emerge along the fence, where they would move to fresh territory and march back into the cornfield again. The tramp didn't want to be seen, because sometimes there was a farmer in a hunting party, and farmers never had any patience with fires, especially in dry weather.

Five men came out of the cornfield, each with his gun raised, but no more pheasants arose and that particular drive was ended. Peeking from behind the pile of ties and through some dried grasses, the tramp saw the nearest hunter throw himself to the ground and say, "If any of you fellows intend to shoot me accidentally today, do it now! I'm all fiddled out!"

"You haven't walked a mile yet, mayor!" another hunter said.

The tramp, looking again, saw that the hunter who had seated himself on the ground not more than fifty feet away was a short fat man, with heavy jowls and deep-set and piggy eyes, altogether one of the meanest-looking men that he had ever seen. The mayor? Sure, that was the mayor! Only a man like that could run all tramps

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out of town and have policemen kicking over a man's frying pan.

He wished that the mayor would get up and disappear along with the other hunters on the return trip into the cornfield, because the carp was beginning to burn. The kindling which he had used as fuel had burned down to a bed of glowing coals—there was no more smoke, which was a blessing, but the heat was intense and the tramp was dismayed to smell his carp scorching. However, the two rows of railroad ties between which the carp was suspended were away from the main heap of ties and in direct line of vision of the mayor; the tramp didn't dare make a grab for his burning fish, for the mayor was just the sort of man who would delight in blowing any tramp's hide full of birdshot.

"The country's growing up in weeds!" the mayor said, as with a gloved hand he pulled cockleburrs from the coat of his hunting dog. "And it's the tractor that's doing it! When I was a boy on the farm we plowed corn with horses, and every time we saw a cockleburr we'd stop the team and get off the plow and pull it, or if the cockleburr was close we didn't even have to stop the team but could just lean down and pull the cockleburr as we went past. But on a tractor you sit too high—you can't lean down and pull anything, and no farmer would think of stopping his tractor and getting off just to pull a cockleburr. So the cockleburr is left to ripen and produce its hundreds of seeds, and that's why the country is going to the dogs, and fast. If I had my way, I'd run all the tractors into a junk heap!"

A second hunter sat down, saying, "The ground in the cornfield has a layer of soft dust on it, and that makes walking heavy."

"There's always somebody taking the joy out of hunting," grumbled the mayor, as he took off his hat, pulled out a handkerchief and mopped his brow. "Last year we went out to the John Dunlap farm, and John had lost a horse, but instead of calling out the rendering works or burying the carcass he just dragged it out in the field, where it was good and ripe on the day we hunted. The wind blew the perfume right in our faces. These worthless farmers never bury their dead stuff, but just drag it out behind their tractor. The farmer makes the whole world his graveyard."

"Well, let's get going," a hunter said, "I want to bag something a little more substantial than tail feathers."

"Wait a minute!" another said, "there's a train coming! Let's wait and watch it go by!"

★

They waited. It was a freight train, first a mere black dot in the distance, then a sudden plume of dark smoke as the fireman shoveled in coal, and finally the thunder of the passing locomotive and the continued clatter of the string of freight cars. In some of the empty box cars men could be seen, standing or sitting in the doorway watching the passing scene.

"Hoboes!" the mayor snorted. "In my town I make short work of them. I run 'em all out."

The freight train died away in the distance; the reclining hunters arose from the ground and, with the others of the party, soon disappeared into the cornfield.

The tramp sprang up and rushed to the fire. The carp was burned to a cinder.

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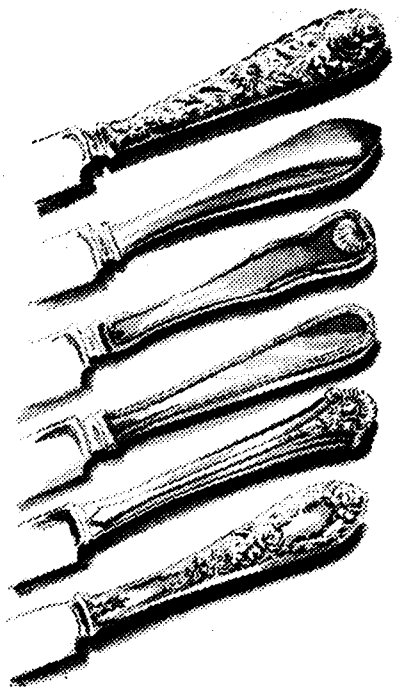

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Communications

TWELVE MILLION HOMES

New York, N. Y.

TO the Editors: Readers of THE COMMONWEAL naturally believe that when they read something in THE COMMONWEAL which is stated as a fact, that it is the truth and the fact. Hence, it disturbs me to read Mr. Robinson's article in the March 28th issue on the housing subject which I know to be untrue and not the fact.

For example, Mr. Robinson states that "slums are among the most profitable properties." After 41 years of buying and selling, financing, appraising and studying real estate in almost every city in the United States, I know that the foregoing statement is wholly and grossly inaccurate and untrue. "Slum" real estate is like a cancer. It is destructive, degrading, decadent and completely unprofitable. At no time in the history of this Republic and under no circumstances has "slum" real estate ever been profitable—but on the contrary. The very designation "slums," the very character "slums" makes the property undesirable and unproductive. One who has lived the subject and knows it, and has paid for the knowledge could testify volumes on the subject.

Mr. Robinson's article further states: "The Taft-Ellender-Wagner Bill would wipe out slums—and some easy real estate profits." I know nothing about the Taft-Ellender-Wagner Bill. It may be good, bad or indifferent; but whatever the bill is, a statement that any bill wiping out slums would wipe out "easy real estate profits" is so grossly misleading and contradictory that it is unconscionable to mislead the readers of the article.

I suppose that Mr. Robinson has had some harsh experiences in attempting to solve his own housing problem, and therefore has become embittered, and consequently led to utterly erroneous conclusions; hence his article, which also states that the "industry's insatiable lust for profits" prevents remedying the housing shortage.

I don't know anything about the National Association of Home Builders, and I don't know anything about the Real Estate Boards; I know nothing about any lobbies or organized action either way, but it is ridiculous to charge the real estate industry with failure to provide housing. Certainly there is a lust for profit, and it is precisely that lust for profit on the part of labor—the carpenter, the bricklayer, the plumber, the painter and of the building material maker that prevents better housing facilities. It is the excessive and unwarranted cost of labor and material that prevents housing development. The real estate man or the home builder or the broker wants profits. His lust for profits is so definite that he would let nothing get in the way of his making a profit if there was an opportunity to do so; but when he cannot get a price for his finished product that will enable him to get his money back plus any profit at all for producing housing—there is your answer!

Mr. Robinson quotes the Chicago Housing Expediter unfavorably, in a manner that distorts the actual picture. I don't know the Chicago Housing Expediter, but I do know that he did not say that veterans must pay $160 a month plus service charges for new apartments. What he did say was that veterans or anyone else who wanted a certain type of apartment would have to pay such a charge. Mr. Robinson quotes a New York realtor as stating "the new ceilings still fell short of the figures required by the industry." But the realtor that Mr. Robinson referred to does not build for veterans, and did not refer to low-cost housing, nor is he a realtor. He is a builder of the highest type of apartments in the country, and of the highest rental value. No one seems to be much worried about how much more the top earning class in the United States has to pay to get new apartments, but it is wrong and mentally dishonest to use that specific instance as though it referred to the low bracket veterans' housing problem.

Certainly it is an outrage that there is so severe a low-cost housing shortage in this country, but the fault is not with the real estate owner nor the builder nor the broker. I am quite sure that however much Mr. Robinson and thousands of others want low-cost housing that they themselves would hardly be willing to pay the present high cost of building material and labor for the privilege of selling their product at a loss.

I am concerned when a publication like THE COMMONWEAL prints so misleading and so inaccurate a story.

L. N. ROSENBAUM.

There seem to be many things of which Mr. Rosenbaum has not heard, which is strange in view of his long experience in the real estate business. But perhaps what he is really saying is that the various real estate lobbies in Washington are beside the point, which is that the builders and brokers are not to blame for the housing shortage. So far as we know, no one in the columns of THE COMMONWEAL *has ever said that they were solely to blame. But their accredited representatives in Washington, about whom Mr. Rosenbaum fortunately knows nothing, certainly bear a heavy share of the blame. On this the record is perfectly clear, and the matter can be verified by consulting the files of any daily newspaper. They have consistently opposed governmental aid in the field of low-cost housing. For precisely the reasons Mr. Rosenbaum himself points out, such housing cannot be supplied on a strictly commercial basis—a fact which even Senator Taft admits.*

While it is perfectly true that much slum property in New York City is unprofitable, the same cannot be said for slum property in other parts of the country. Indeed, as a general rule, slum property has long been one of the most desirable investments for what might be described as lower middle class savings. In a brief note it is impossible to produce elaborate evidence for this statement, but anyone who studies the subject quickly runs into this fact. This, of course, is not to say that slum property has as great value as the same property had before it turned into slums; but rather that the return is good on the capital value as slum property.—THE EDITORS.

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ART AND MATTER

Montclair, New Jersey

TO the Editors: I have read Father King's excellent article in your Education Number and I agree with the author in his observation that familiar paintings and statues of sacred subjects are very poor art indeed. However, I must object to Father King's ridiculing devotion to the Infant Jesus of Prague. "Genuine crystal eyes, very lifelike, $12 extra"—statues are not supposed to be *objets d'art,* but simple demonstrations of a childlike love for the human nature of the Divine Infant and a desire to adore Him as an expression of that love. No doubt, this is a very earthy devotion but, I ask, why does He see fit to reward it, as He surely does, if it is an insult to Him?

Until there are more religious representations of a loftier nature and until more Christians are educated to appreciate them, I am afraid that the gaudy ones will have to do.

JANE ANNE EDWARDS.

Paris, Arkansas

TO the Editors: Congratulations on your publication of Father David Ross King's article, "Art and Matter" (April 11, 1947). That is splendid writing, worthy of a Father Gerald Vann, O.P.

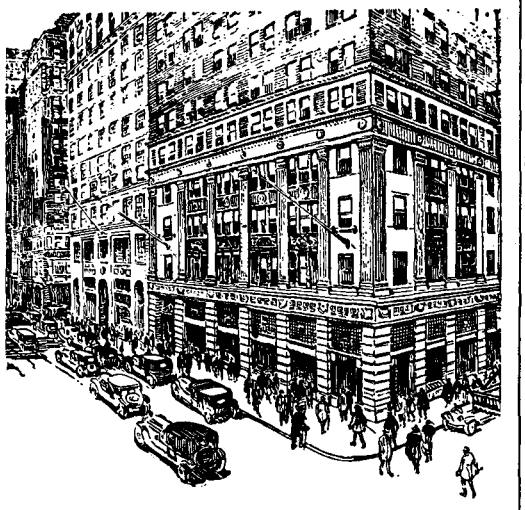
DONALD J. BURKE.

"STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM"

Chicago, Ill.

TO the Editors: It is always comforting to a reviewer to learn that his reviews are read, and by prominent people. In THE COMMONWEAL, April 18, Father George G. Higgins seems to indicate his disapproval of the late Professor Edmunds of St. Louis University and of me. Evidently Father Higgins dislikes the political philosophy of the late professor and further disapproves of my endorsement of the position taken by Professor Edmunds. I realize that in all such matters it is assumed that the censured reviewer should maintain that he is being misunderstood. But I very definitely do not take that position; Father Higgins understood my position precisely and is naturally altogether entitled to his opinion.

Possibly if Father Higgins will read the book in question, "Struggle for Freedom," he may feel less severe toward its author and reviewer. I can assure Father Higgins that he gave a great many people besides me much pleasure when he wrote: "For, believe me, the bureaucrats are on the run in Washington." That is precisely the way we in the Middle West want it to be. Many others must feel the same way, judging by the election returns of 1946. Incidentally, I was not aware that I wrote "patronizingly" in my review. Such an attitude would be altogether unjustified on my part. May I add that sarcasm is also out of place in open letters? Father Higgins writes: "And the defenders of the Constitution have only begun to fight. Give them another year and they will have demonstrated conclusively to the chastened bureaucrats that it doesn't pay to trifle with the liberties of the American people." Although I believe the last two sentences were intended to be sarcastic, I am



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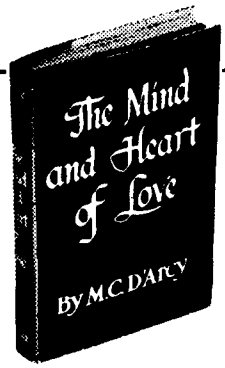

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of the opinion that they also contain much of a prophetic nature. The majority of the American people, judging by the actions of their representatives in Congress, are thoroughly tired of agencies and administrative boards. The Constitution intended that the country should be governed by Congress, not by administrative boards. That is all that Professor Edmunds advocated; that is all that I approved in my review. Don't you agree with that, Father Higgins?

PAUL KINIERY.

LONDON'S WOE

New York, N. Y.

TO the Editors: Coming back from a winter in France I find in THE COMMONWEAL two articles about England, "Snow in England" and "London's Woe." I did not go to England, but, from what we were told in France, the pictures drawn in the two articles must be accurate. No doubt the British have it tough now. And, before, for the last seven years, they have had it tough. Everyone knows that, and that they stood it gallantly and that they held on doggedly when all seemed lost. Only, though the plight of one does not lessen the other's, it is a trifle irritating to hear it talked about as if it were the worst condition in Europe. I do not think that France's situation is especially bad now from a European point of view, yet I could duplicate Alice Curtayne's article nearly word for word and even add to it considerably, while the conditions described by Paulding's English friend are so familiar in France that it is trite to speak of them.

But there are two points worth making. First, notwithstanding the admiration the British deserve and which I mentioned above, they have not had as tough a time of it as the rest of Europe. They have not through five long years been invaded, occupied, deported, shot, tortured, carried away to concentration camps or gas chambers. There is that enormous difference between the British and the rest of the European people. The European people have known all the British have known, bombing, ruins, starvation, and on a much larger scale, and in addition, they have had all the rest.

Yet, and this is the second point, I said I could duplicate the present tales of woe of the British articles, yes, but not completely. Mention is made of "battered, tired faces, gray, lined, prematurely aged, stamped with endurance, sorrowfully expectant, apprehensive," and that "no one can keep working indefinitely if there is nothing decent to eat, nothing to smoke, nothing to drink etc. . . ." Here is where the French branch off: they have nothing decent to eat, nothing to smoke, nothing to drink, but they are *not* prematurely aged, sorrowfully expectant, apprehensive. And they keep on working indefinitely. Is it that having known affliction to a point that not only Americans but even British cannot begin to conceive that they find the present hardships hardly worth mentioning? Whatever the reason, I found this winter tender comfort and virile inspiration in the gentle and valiant smile of cold, hungry, bereft France.

CLAIRE HUCHET BISHOP.

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The Stage & Screen

One "Elegant Thimble"

SPRING does seem to be the time for the "Alice in Wonderland" Caucus Race for awards. As somebody put it, in this country they start giving out the prizes on April Fool's day. Now, with the Guggenheims safely away, the Pulitzer and the Academy business just round the corner, everybody is running as hard as they can and leaving off, I suppose, whenever they like. It is true no one has ever given me a prize for anything, although I think they will in time, but that is not at present important. What I want to tell about is the just announced Drama Critics' prize, in which I had, timorously but determinedly, a "Dodo's" share. Protocol at the Drama Critics Circle is really very interesting; they have got a procedure called "Popeye" which is interesting, and an amendment called the Shipley (*New Leader*) Amendment, which works. And what's more, it's all written down in a Constitution so that you can study it beforehand. By the Shipley Amendment you get three chances to vote, and in between these, the Constitution *said* there could be "discussion . . . if desired." It seemed to me, after thought, that in that one word *discussion* lay the real crux of the assembly, when everyone could honestly play critic, and fight and formulate. Balancing this against the triple possibilities of the Shipley Amendment, it seemed to me that if anyone was going to have to be stupid enough not to vote for Arthur Miller's "All My Sons" on the first ballot, it would have to be me. I was going to have to vote for "Brigadoon." And in the ensuing "discussion," I was going to have to rear up, however ridiculously, and take on something like this: *Crawford, Lerner and Loewe have titled "Brigadoon" a "Musical Play." This is a new form. It consists of a play (book, plot, fable) in which the elements of music, dance, verse, and dialogue are all inherent and motivate the action. As such, "Brigadoon" is the only original example of the Lyric Theater commercially on view. The Lyric Theater is the Poet's Theater. The present and future Poet's Theater in this country depends not at all upon traditional iambic pentameters slurred around a stage in opposition to every modern rhythm, but upon a realization and extension of this new form. The Poet's Theater is important.*

I suppose there is no fool like an April one. But, having this column to clear things in, I don't mind being IT. What happened was simple. On the first ballot, the mention of "Brigadoon" made everyone look at me as though I were only a girl, a process which no woman can resist. There was no *discussion* at all. Subsequently, honest Tom Wenning (*Newsweek*) helped me to add my choices correctly; and intrepid George Freedley (*Morning Telegraph*) promised to use the words "invention" and "lyric" in the citation. "All My Sons" got my third, as well as the majority's vote; and "Brigadoon" got the *Musical* rather than the *Play* prize.

I don't know at all whether Cheryl Crawford (pro-

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ducer) will care for this actual thimble I am determined to give her. If nothing else, it *is* an elegant and historical one: found by a GI in a ditch in Belgium in a tight moment of the Bulge. But I think it should fit her. I hope she will try it on, and will also let Lerner and Loewe, Agnes De Mille, Lincoln Kirstein, Arnold Sundergaard, and all the movers of "Finian" try it on. Perhaps in the end it will arrive where it really belongs—at the Internationale, with "Alice," in the hands of the other "Dodo."

KAPPO PHELAN.

Unusual—To Say the Least

BY NOW everyone knows that the central character of *"Monsieur Verdoux"* is a modern Bluebeard who murders his wives for their money. So the biggest surprise is not that Charles Chaplin made such a picture, but that it is so hilariously funny at times—especially when its own plot does not slow up the action with talkiness or when its hero's spurious philosophy is not being seriously expounded. It seems that M. Verdoux considers life very cheaply and finds justification for his casual murders during the days of the Depression when suicides were frequent and the gathering clouds of war promised murder on a big scale. Of course the delightful comedy moments, even those tinged with the macabre, are due to Chaplin, the supreme clown. He is not the little fellow with cane, derby and baggy pants; in fact he is very sleek as the debonair Frenchman complete with flower in button hole and polished manners. And when he goes in for pantomime, whether in the slapstick tradition or with the delicate precision of a ballet dancer, Chaplin is at his best; his picture glows with freshness and the sparkle of high wit. The scene in which he shows his house to a woman who turns out to be a prospective wife actually bubbles with gay satire on salesmanship; and the later scenes with Martha Raye, as the wife who proves too tough to kill, are a riot of burlesque. But many of the other episodes, those connected with his first wife, whom he really loves, and those built around the young girl (Marilyn Nash) whom he befriends are inclined to be static, mawkish in sentiment and only a thin gloss for Verdoux's social and political theories. I cannot say how much of his plot Chaplin actually borrowed from Landru, the French Bluebeard whose case made headlines a few years ago; but since Chaplin wrote, produced, directed and even composed the music for his film, he must be blamed for its faults as well as its funs.

Admirers of horses have every right to wonder why every movie that mixes horses and men is so corny. I can't tell them why, but I can point to a bright, shiny, new example. *"The Homestretch"* is about a handsome, carefree horseman (Cornel Wilde) and the beautiful woman (Maureen O'Hara) from Boston who jilts her perfectly respectable fiancé (Glenn Langan) to marry this horsey guy and float from race track to race track. She tires of him and his phoney friends, returns to her ex-fiancé who gladly takes her back, of course. But by that time horses are in her blood; and in the big race before the film's finale, her horse beats her husband's. The fade-out shows Maureen and Cornel embracing on the lawn before his old mansion in Maryland.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

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Among Spring Books

IN ADDITION to the books reviewed in full in this issue, the following volumes seem, in the opinion of the editors, worthy of special mention.

Politics

Operations in North African Waters. Samuel Eliot Morison (Little, $5.00), is the brilliant official Navy account of the period from October, 1942, to June, 1943; the author is equally adept at writing and navigating.

Germany's Underground. Allen W. Dulles (Macmillan, $3.50), tells the exciting story of the opposition to Hitler which developed within Germany and outlined a program which has great validity especially in these latter days.

The Dark Side of the Moon, preface by T. S. Eliot (Scribners, $2.75), is one of the truly important volumes of this season. Its subject the fate of the Poles in the Soviet Union from 1939 to 1944.

Wartime Correspondence between President Roosevelt and Pope Pius XII (Macmillan, $2.50) rounds out this quartette of truly remarkable war books. There were eleven major exchanges which Mr. Roosevelt set in motion at Christmas, 1939, with his offer to send the Vatican a personal representative "in order that our parallel endeavors for peace and the alleviation of suffering may be assisted."

The Struggle for the World. James Burnham (John Day, $3.00), is a brilliantly argued anti-Soviet diagnosis of the immediate future and its power politics.

Why They Behave Like Russians. John Fischer (Harper, $2.75), somewhat parallels the Burnham volume in subject and point of view, but is based on extensive recent firsthand observation in the USSR, supplying considerable Russian detail. Mr. Fischer's conclusions are unusually sensible, especially his emphasis on the strategic importance of making the American economy work.

A Study of History. D. C. Somervell (Oxford, $5.00), is the book with the greatest *éclat* of the spring. Mr. Somervell's one-volume digest and interpretation of Toynbee, undertaken for his own amusement, has resulted in a work which has won the plaudits not only of the great historical master himself but of the widest range of current observers. Remarkable juggling of centuries, continents and civilizations occurs in nearly every chapter.

Introducing Alaska. J. B. Caldwell (Putnam, $3.75), and *Alaska, Land of Tomorrow.* Edward A. Herron (Whittlesey, $2.75). The first of these over-sells the different opportunities for making a living in our northwestern frontier; the second is a well illustrated seasonal description of its various geographical sectors.

The Soil and Health. Sir Albert Howard (Devin, $4.00), is a fascinating basic book on the relationship of biodynamic cultivation of the soil to health in plants, animals and humans.

A Free and Responsible Press. Commission on Freedom of the Press (Chicago, $2.50). Messrs. Hutchins, Shuster and others present an important study which

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Fiction

The Root and the Flower. L. H. Myers (Harcourt, $4.00). The four novels, in one compact volume which made up the late L. H. Myers's masterpiece—his study of the court of Akbar in sixteenth century India.

Under the Volcano. Malcolm Lowry (Reynal, $3.00). The story of the thoughtful and talkative decline of an alcoholic consul in Mexico, sometime before the recent war. Perhaps not the most interesting novel since Joyce and Proust—as some say it is—but certainly some of the best writing in a long while.

The Mountain Lion. Jean Stafford (Harcourt, $2.75). A study, set in the American West, of a brother and sister groping through the painful human experience of growing up. More than confirms the things that were said in the wake of her first and successful book, "Boston Adventure."

Three Short Novels. Vercors (Little, $2.00). Further examples of the writing done by Jean Bruller ("Vercors" was his French Underground name) while the Germans were sojourning in France.

In This Thy Day. Michael McLaverty (Macmillan, $2.50. An Irish family chronicle done in the best misty tradition of that Island.

Checquer Board. Nevil Shute (Morrow, $2.75). Mr. Shute's investigation of the color problem, conducted through the medium of his central character, an English cereal salesman who, on being told by his doctor that he has but three months to live, sets out to look up some of the people he ran across during the war. Technically enterprising.

The Quarry. Mildred Walker (Harcourt, $3.00). A story of family life in Vermont during the Civil War and the political and personal troubles of a plausible collection of Northern and Southern types.

The Left Hand Is the Dreamer. Nancy Wilson Ross (Sloane, $3.50). A fresh and dexterous working over of one of the more familiar novel plots: the dreamy woman who is roused from the framework of a tedious marriage by the arrival of a significant male.

Consider the Lilies of the Field. Erico Verissimo (Macmillan, $3.00). An example of how a popular Brazilian writer goes about writing what we call a psychological novel. This one concerns the effect of a violent death (a young girl falls or appears to fall from an upper story of a skyscraper) on a group of people—witnesses—who may be said to represent a cross-section of Brazilian society.

Dust on the King's Highway. Helen C. White (Macmillan, $3.50). A charming historical novel based on the struggles and accomplishments of the Spanish missionaries who labored among the Indians of California and Mexico some two hundred years ago.

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Miscellaneous

The Psalms: A New Translation. Ronald Knox (Sheed, $2.00). A clear and sensitive prose rendering with excellent, and not too numerous, notes, in portable format.

Pilgrim of the Absolute. Léon Bloy (Pantheon, $3.50). An extremely successful attempt to convey to English-speaking readers the main lines of Bloy's thought, life and spiritual temper. An extraordinary figure. Absorbingly interesting.

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Human Destiny. Lecomte du Noüy (Longmans, $3.50). Another scientist, this time a very prominent Frenchman, sees the existence of God in the world he has studiously investigated.

Lady Gregory's Journals, edited by Lennox Robinson (Macmillan, $3.00). There may come a time when interest in the origins of the Irish literary movement diminishes, but that time does not seem anywhere near at hand. Lady Gregory's life and all connected with it remain of interest.

Thinking It Over. Thomas F. Woodlock (McMullen, $3.00). A long life of very varied experiences, meditated upon with both charm and depth, furnished the late Mr. Woodlock with an ability to speak of widely diverse matters with wisdom.

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Theology and Sanity. F. J. Sheed (Sheed, $3.00). A very able and somewhat original summary of Catholic theology as the road to objective truth, and consequently to personal serenity.

This is a rather

LITERARY SPRING

at Sheed & Ward. A new series, **Great Writers of the World,** begins with **HORACE** by Alfred Noyes, (May 7th), the second will be **BOCCACCIO** by Francis MacManus (June); others in preparation will be on Dante, De Maupassant and Rabelais—a nicely mixed collection, as you see. All will follow the same general lines—a biographical portrait of the subject in the context of his own time and country, plentiful quotation (with translation) and an evaluation of his influence since. If all the volumes are as good as these first two, it will certainly be a whale of a series. All (need we say?) will be written from a Catholic point of view, and each will be priced at $3.50 **JACOB'S NIGHT** by Wallace Fowlie consists of essays on modern French writers, poets and painters, what they are doing, what their significance is for us; and we have a new book on Leon Bloy coming (ready May 7th) **LEON BLOY,** A Study in Impatience by Albert Beguin ($2.75), which may make that terrifying man a shade easier to understand. Nevile Watts' book on the necessity for poetry, and how to get the most out of it, **THE VISION SPLENDID** ($2.00), we still think a darned good book in spite of the *Commonweal* reviewer who hated it so.

To balance all this literary-ness, we have a new book on Confession, **PARDON AND PEACE** by Alfred Wilson, C.P. ($2.50), which is helpful, comprehensive and amusing; it will leave readers with a new appreciation of the wisdom and understanding God shows us in this least popular of the Sacraments. Msgr. Ronald Knox's translation of **THE PSALMS** ($2.00), is ready at last (and no book was ever more worth waiting for).

THE REDEMPTION OF ISRAEL by John Friedman ($2.00), is as startling a book as we have seen in years. The time for the conversion of the Jews is *now,* says the author. His reasons are drawn from Scripture, history and the present miseries of his people, and extraordinarily convincing they are. What is most pleasing (but how it will infuriate the anti-semitic!) is the glorious destiny he forsees for Catholic Israel.

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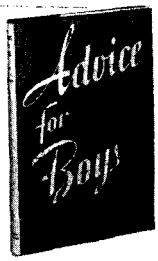

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Books of the Week

Christ Stopped at Eboli. Carlo Levi. Farrar, Straus. $3.00.

WHEN THE ITALIANS set forth to conquer the world, starting with Ethiopia, they attended to one little detail by requesting Carlo Levi to live very quietly until further notice within the limits of a village called Gagliano, which is in the province of Lucania, a miserably sad, malarial and abandoned region just north of the Gulf of Taranto. It is just north of Calabria which is abandoned also. Carlo Levi lived in Gagliano for a year or so, and in this book writes about what he saw, what he heard, what the peasants told him, what he thought.

He thought and the peasants thought that Christ, that Christianity, that any hope, any possibility or reason for hope, had never come nearer to Gagliano than the town of Eboli—a railroad station on the main line, an outpost of Neapolitan civilization, many miles to the north. "We're not Christians," the peasants told him, "we're not human beings, we're not thought of as men but simply as beasts, beasts of burden, or even less than beasts, mere creatures of the wild."

No one ever goes to Lucania—not to stay there. The Romans came with their State and their Religion, but there were more interesting parts to govern, and the peasants looked at them and then were left alone; the Franks came with a feudal society; they failed and departed; the Kingdom of Naples came and left; then the new Italian State, then Fascism. In this war Montgomery came up the coast to join with the Americans below Salerno; the Germans were in Eboli and it was from Eboli that they launched their attack against our beachhead—not from Gagliano or from Lucania; Lucania was still by-passed even by destruction.

So that the peasants have remained always alone, subject, in their poverty, to poverty-stricken land-owners, subject to the delegates of the State, of any state, the tax collectors of all the states that have come one after another.

Carlo Levi is a sensitive man, a doctor and a painter; he has written a beautiful and human book, looking at this immeasurable distress and putting down the reasons for it. Although after his medical studies he had not practiced, it was quite impossible for him to escape the pressing appeal of the Gagliano peasants for help, and so he did what he could until the fascists stopped him—and that too was a way for him to know these people who trusted him. They were open to anyone who would

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help—but no one had ever helped them, and so habitually they were remote and silent. At dawn the men go down the steep hill from the village to the barren fields; at nightfall they return for short rest and brief oblivion; obstinately they manage to live. For a short moment in their lives the children manage to play—some of them.

You would think that the peasants of Gagliano would be less than men after so many centuries of suffering; eternally in the presence of poverty and death they are what we are all of us—who have forgotten in our safety what it is like to be alone, uncomforted, on earth. Carlo Levi loved these men and women and it is possible in reading his extraordinary and eloquent account to forget the dismal horror of their lives; it is possible to think of them as symbols of man's state, at its simplest, unredeemed. But that they should be living as they live, a long day's motor drive from the capital of Christendom, is surely one of the most flagrant challenges to our trust in Christian solidarity. C. G. PAULDING.

Aspects of the Novel. E. M. Forster. Harcourt. $2.50.

MR. FORSTER'S informal essay on the novel, first presented on a lectureship at Cambridge, is now reissued some twenty years after its original publication. Its opinions are still fresh, probably because they are so deeply a matter of Mr. Forster's own quite personal language; they seem to resist indefinitely the quick processes which make intolerable clichés of most of our current critical pronouncements.

And his obliquities yield some memorable little clues to that literary form for which he can only quote somebody's definition: "a fiction in prose of a certain length." It is here that he makes, for instance, his distinction between "story" and "plot." "'The king died and then the queen died,' is a story. 'The king died, and then the queen died of grief,' is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the essence of casuality overshadows it." Again: he tells us that a character is "real" when we sense that "the novelist knows everything about it," even though the novelist may keep his knowledge hidden. "He will give us the feeling that though the character has not been explained, it is explicable, and we get from this a reality of a kind we can never get in daily life." And despite Mr. Forster's refusal to impose a definitive shape upon the novel, he does some service by assuring us of some continuity in its language and its techniques, when he juxtaposes passages from Dickens and Wells, Richardson and James, Sterne and Virginia Woolf, and teases the audience with the similarities.

Much of the time, however, Mr. Forster's tone is so ingratiating, so desperately coy, that you are irritated into wishing for a plain statement from one of those professors from whom he tries so hard to dissociate himself. He wants to take himself "quietly" (as he criticizes Meredith for not doing); he assures his audience constantly that he will be unscientific, that he is an unorthodox successor to the lectureship, that he simply wants to chat. This indirectness becomes harder to read than the kind of thing Mr. Forster is reacting against; he is prolix, and unguided by proportion: one has to read twenty-five pages to learn what exact shade of subtlety is meant by "Yes—oh, dear, yes—the novel tells a story" when it is spoken in "a drooping, regretful voice." From reacting against preciousness, it is its own kind of preciousness; from reacting against pedantry, it is its own kind of rather

"She's too young, too good looking, and her manner is much too free . . ."

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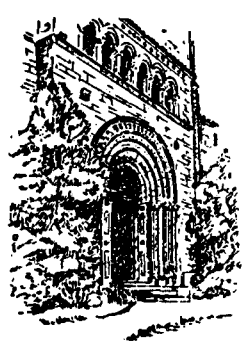

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intimate pedantry. And from wishing to avoid doctrine, it is doctrinaire: how easy everything becomes once you have relaxed into rosy, after-dinner opinions like the division of all characters into "flat" and "round," how pleasant to contemplate rather diffidently the little fuss of conversation while everyone puzzles over your whimsical choice of words, how effortless to say of "Remembrance of Things Past," even before its publication is complete, "The book is chaotic, ill constructed, it has and will have no external shape."

Mr. Forster's position is explicit when he discusses fantasies. He is reluctant to theorize "because any statement as to their subject matter brings these novels into the claws of critical apparatus, from which it is important that they should be saved." I know what pleasure there is in making such statements. The audience is assured that the lecture is not going to hurt; one looks not only comfortable but graceful, because there is a special *chic* in expressing an occasional low-brow opinion; one might even be carried away, as Mr. Forster is, in making the obvious jokes about Henry James; and for a moment everyone, audience and speaker, thinks that the *daemonos* of exactitude does not exist. Unfortunately, nothing can be saved from the claws of critical apparatus. The only consolation is that the really good thing can be looked at closely, and in fact no matter how closely we look at it, it continues to surprise us with new delights.

HENRY RAGO.

Alexander I of Russia. Leonid I. Strakhovsky. Norton. $3.50.

THE JACKET advertises Leonid Strakhovsky's work too accurately as scholarship, romantic novel and detective story. It is an extremely interesting and provocative book, seriously marred by mixture of style and conflict of purpose.

It is primarily a biography, and certainly Alexander I of Russia, "the man who defeated Napoleon," is a magnificent subject, in the tradition of wonderful and tragic persons we know from Russian literature. In addition to great personal interest in the Tsar and in the people around him, the book evokes and dramatizes with clear definition the bafflingly divided culture of Russia in the 19th Century. The "progressive" elements of the ruling class, including Alexander during most of his reign, were Western European and largely French Enlightenment in their progressiveness. But their dominant position in their country, which permitted them to become westernized, was a fact of a very different Russian Orthodox culture—in which the overwhelming mass of the people, constituting all, indeed, but a minute and exotic fraction of the top domination, steadfastly maintained themselves.

Alexander was himself torn to pieces by this dualism. The mysterious solution to his harrowing problems given by Mr. Strakhovsky—the pretended death and burial, the pilgrimage and then the long, hidden life in Siberia as a free lance, holy semi-hermit—very much ought to be true, and the evidence brought forth is highly convincing. Alexander's religious tendencies which gradually prevailed in his life are also pictured as tremendously Russian and captivating, and vague and formless to a tragic degree. Again, Alexander maintained a bond with Russian Orthodox religious leaders, or at least ardent amateurs, and he consulted "leading mystics" of the West . . . "Saint Martin, Eckartshausen, Swedenborg, Lavater, and

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June-Stilling," and then went thoroughly Orthodox in abdication.

The story of Alexander I is of course enlivened by the parallel of his triumph and the dominance which Russia held over continental Europe after Napoleon and the recent position of his successor, Stalin, and of his empire. But the parallel should not be pressed too firmly. Alexander had no sharp plan. His peculiar benevolence and radicalism were notably misty, and resulted internationally in the loosely constituted and loosely constructed "Holy Alliance." The rigid formulas of communism, with "multinational Bolshevism" are not closely comparable. Perhaps there is something of a constant factor in the monstrous results of having an ill-westernized "vanguard" translate into Russian practice selected reforms derived from western theoreticians who themselves do not function in the main life stream of the West and are not attached by any useful roots to the East. Alexander's "military settlements," conceived with frustrated European humanitarian motives, may have been disturbingly symbolic. PHILIP BURNHAM.

Lament for the Sleepwalker. Dunstan Thompson. Dodd. $2.50.

THESE POEMS are leagues apart from those in Dunstan Thompson's first book, for death and terror have come between and love has played him false. The younger book was full of virtuosity and high excitement. He used his bright artificial images, the jewels, princes, peacocks and unicorns, with an intensity of beginning. It was a discovery of poetry.

And now, in "Lament for the Sleepwalker," skulls and burning accompany the ruins of love.

> Nightmare is livelong by a never-ending:
> In the most mandrake forest, I walk, love lost,
> Through panther grass toward no good morrow. Agave
> Leaves like hundred years impale my ghost
> On yesterdays of youth. At crossroad stands
> The strangler with his four and frantic hands.

His earlier poems always carried a special torture which did not allow the world much room. Whatever posturing they had seemed to be a cover for loneliness. Now he has no witness but fatality.

Yet there is a new kind of strength in "Lament for the Sleepwalker." I have not read a book of contemporary poetry which has such an Elizabethan feeling of darkness. I have seen few war poems which show so intense and individual a reaction to cataclysm. The brilliance and the artificial imagery are still there, but added to them is courage, after defeat. Implicit in his formality is a refusal to give in.

All this in spite of guilt and nightmare; now that the acting on the antic stages of his youth has led him to where

> This make-believe is murder on the stage
> Where I become myself.

What is moving is the pride, as much as the dazzle and facility. And, out of his darkness he can also fashion

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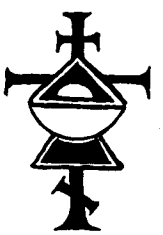

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what is honest and simple, as in this sonnet to his father:

Sea Lord, the sun in shrouds, and England rides
Like a death ship through the fog. Morning my
Midnight, now alack a day you lie
Under the far earth at Arlington. Tides
Trouble for a time their oceans, and on all sides
Of the world tears are for a moment, and history
Rises and falls. But the sailor's true blue eye
Fathoms the poor wreck of life: the wave abides.
Ah, Captain, you died at peace, although a war
Broke your heart, as once before your son had.
The years like roses darken, die: so fade
The roses on our grave. How the dead are
Easily put by. How the incomparable dead
Are easily forgotten. How still the dead.

JOHN HAY.

Unquiet Seed. Jane Cuddeback. Pellegrini & Cudahy. $3.00.

THE STRUGGLE to raise tobacco in upstate New York submerges everything else in this authentically "folksy" novel—even Papa's infatuation for the provocative new hired girl. Atmosphere wins out over everything else. So exacting is the task imposed by that capricious money crop that what it costs the family in sweat, dirt, back-breaking and anxiety hardly seems worth it. Miss Cuddeback makes it all seem very real.

The Face of Saints. Wilhelm Schamoni, translated by Anne Fremantle. Pantheon. $4.50.

THE AUTHOR'S introduction to this rather impressive volume explains briefly, simply and convincingly the nature of sanctity and provides a good factual outline of the process of canonization in various Christian ages. The book itself, with its hundred and twenty illustrations of all types, is focused on what individual saints actually looked like. Dr. Schamoni insists that for this purpose "the death mask offers an ideal solution." He was able to reproduce twenty-two of these, but more than half of his portraits are full-page reprodutions of authentic frescoes, drawings, lithographs, etc. Accompanying each is a short, informative but hardly complete biography as an encyclopedia would do it, but with certain splashes of color. Italian saints predominate, with French and Spanish liberally represented. There are some fascinating mosaics of the early Fathers, but more than two-thirds of the author's portraits and biographies deal with men and women from the fifteenth century onward. He does a good job in avoiding over-sentimentalization. This volume will serve as an unusual introduction to the science of the saints.

EDWARD SKILLIN, JR.

The Portable Dante. Edited by Paolo Milano. Viking. $2.00.

THE APPEARANCE of a "portable" Dante can only mean that the author of the Divine Comedy looms large for modern man. It is evidence that his poetry and his thought are especially relevant to our poetry and our thought. Evidence also that Dante may be enjoyed and understood even in the subway. Remarkably enough, the book is compact but not compressed. Its 700 pages contain all that is most important in Dante —the whole Divine Comedy, the *Vita Nuova,* selections

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from his Rhymes and Epistles, and excerpts from his treatises on politics and language. And yet there is plenty of space where the reader may rest and think, and scribble what he thinks.

Paolo Milano's introduction provides an excellent frame of reference. It gives the important facts of Dante's life, the dominant ideas of his time, and some of the things which scholars have discussed. Above all, this editor's remarks have the simple enthusiasm which comes from a genuine poetic emotion.

Much could be said about the translations. The Divine Comedy is given as an English poem in Laurence Binyon's version. If a translation should aim at reproducing the metrical form of the original, this is a commendable effort. But triple rhyme is not suited to the English language—witness Dryden's own attempt. And the exact meaning of Dante's words is too often lost. Nevertheless, in format, printing, manufacture, and content, this is a fine way to get to know Dante. NANCY LENKEITH.

Trollope: A Commentary. By Michael Sadleir. Farrar, Strauss. $4.00.

MICHAEL SADLEIR has the English talent for combining sound scholarship with a light touch and a charming artistry of presentation in what may be called the expert amateur approach. This method, born of the public school tradition that it is bad form to be good at anything but games (and even then essential to be deprecatory about it) and of the Oxford-Cambridge tradition of humane learning, affords a sharp and pleasant contrast to the dull Teutonic pedantry which still afflicts too many American studies in history and literature. This book will at once delight the hardened Trollopean and excite the interest of the novice in a once forgotten Eminent Victorian who has recently become the idol of a vigorous and rapidly expanding cult. The present reviewer's own complete conversion to the cult—a process initiated oddly enough, by Ronald Knox's parodies—was brought about by the discovery that Trollope's novels were the best possible reading for wartime travel, a grueling test of readability.

This book is a revised edition of a work published in 1922. According to the author's foreword to the American edition, the present book has been improved by being "simplified throughout," though it contains little fresh material. Mr. Sadleir makes acknowledgment to the Stebbins's recent *The Trollopes* (without mentioning the authors) for remedying the shortcomings of his exclusively British research. The book does not contain the original foreword by A. Edward Newton, who during the period of Trollope's eclipse on both sides of the Atlantic was "as faithful as any and more vociferous than most" of a small band of steadfast admirers. Mr. Sadleir pays tribute to these Americans who kept alive Trollope's reputation during this period—"a period now gone by and never to return."

The book contains a good deal more than its laconic title and modest subtitle indicate. There is an introductory study of the epoch of which Trollope is perhaps the best voice. This brief study of the mid-Victorian (1861-79) period is penetrating and richly suggestive. Mr. Sadleir reminds us of the importance of differentiating between the earlier Victorian period of which Mrs. Trollope was a spokesman, the vital middle one, and the late Victorianism which rebelled against the smug world

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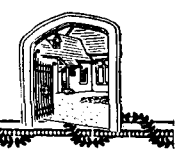

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Current Books and The Commonweal

An exhaustive perusal of the dust jackets of leading current titles will reveal few, if any, encomiums from Commonweal critics. And quotes from The Commonweal seldom adorn publishers' advertising columns in the daily papers. That does not reflect an unfriendly approach to current literature on the part of our reviewers. It is rather that they do not often toss their hats in unreflective fashion.

In fact, since Commonweal reviews are honest, sympathetic and thoughtful in character, the magazine serves as an excellent guide to present-day writing. Certain books prove to be important enough to serve as subjects for feature articles; others are treated extensively in shorter "book articles;" most volumes are dealt with in straight reviews of varying lengths.

Finally there is a distinctly literary quality even to the political articles which The Commonweal features week after week. A few reasons why the magazine is so widely recommended for readers whose chief interest is current literature!

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which Trollope depicted with such fidelity. Then a nearly full-scale study of Mrs. Trollope precedes the central biographical and critical account of her son Anthony which is the core of the book. This in turn is followed by a careful study of his work. Appendices include chronologies and bibliographies of both Frances and Anthony Trollope, as well as a "classification of Trollope's Fiction" very helpful to the tyro appalled by the bulk of Anthony's work. Other appendices contain the unpublished introductory pages of Trollope's unfinished "History of Fiction" and the author's advance layouts for "Sir Harry Hotspur" and "The Way We Live Now."

There is a brief index of proper names and titles, whose amplification would make a most useful book still more useful. The book contains by way of illustrations a portrait of Trollope and reproductions of both Ronald Knox's and Spencer Nichols's reconstructed maps of Barsetshire, along with Trollope's own long lost plan of the country which he made so real that many expect to find it on the map of England.

Mr. Sadleir has omitted from this edition, because of wartime and postwar publishing conditions, a checklist of cheap reprints of Trollope's novels. The ardent Trollopean is therefore advised that several of them have just appeared in the Oxford World Classics and the Modern Library.

MASON WADE.

The Cycles of the Kings. Myles Dillon. Oxford. $3.25.

THIS is a book of the first order of importance for all who are interested in Irish history and the ancient sagas and folk-tales of the Irish people—in that rather wonderful body of literature, perhaps the oldest in Europe, which has come down to us orally, through untold generations, out of the ages before the beginning of history.

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DAVID MARSHALL.

CONTRIBUTORS

Francois MAURIAC, the author of "Woman of the Pharisees," "Viper's Tangle" and other novels, regularly contributes to *Figaro* of Paris, which originally published these comments.

Vincent SHEEAN is the author of "Personal History" and a number of memoirs and historical novels. During the war he served as an army officer in the European theater.

Albert EISELE is a farmer, columnist and short-story writer from Blue Earth, Minn.

Henry RAGO, poet and critic, is currently teaching at the University of Chicago.

John HAY is at work on a volume of poems and sends us this review from Cape Cod, Mass.

Nancy LENKEITH, a new COMMONWEAL reviewer, has been doing graduate work at Columbia University.

Mason WADE'S most recent book is "The French Canadian Outlook," and he is at present preparing a more exhaustive volume on the subject of French Canada.

David MARSHALL is a New York newspaperman and author, whose most recent book, "Grand Central," is at present attracting nationwide interest.

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